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THE NINE US ARMY MEN

What the Foreign Office Told AP

In an interview with AP correspondents Seymour Topping and Rolf Steinberg on June 26th, Otto Winzer, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the German Democratic Republic, answered a number of questions on the detention in the Republic of the nine US army men and the helicopter in which they landed.

Here is the full text of the interview, which German Report believes will be of interest to readers:

Herr Winzer: Mr. Steinberg asked us for an interview nearly two weeks ago. We did not refuse this interview out of shyness. I am myself an old journalist, after all. We exercised restraint so as not to influence unduly a rapid and expert settlement of the affair. As we told you at that time, we are of the opinion that a broad treatment of the subject in the press would not help the American State Department for Foreign Affairs to deal with the matter realistically.

American and West German papers, however, have in the past few days published a number of articles and reports which simply force us to abandon our restraint and to make certain statements in the interests of truth and a clarification of the actual position. That is why we have asked you to come.

In view of recent unfavourable experiences I should like to ask you one question: Are you certain that what I am about to tell you will be passed on by your agency?

Mr. Topping: Associated Press is an independent cooperative news agency. It deals objectively with news. I can assure the minister that what he is about to tell us will be sent out word for word. I should like to add one limitation, however; the report will certainly be accurate, but I cannot guarantee that everything you will say will be published in the American papers. What is published is decided in every case by the American editor of the paper in question. The task of the news agency is simply to provide the news. I assure you that everything you say will be passed on accurately and word for word by the news agency.

Herr Winzer: Objectivity looks somewhat different according to the point of view from which you consider it. We do not want to argue on that point. This is not our business here. Please put your questions.

Mr. Topping: The first question is: Are you prepared to renew discussions on this matter with the delegates of the United States?

Herr Winzer: To that I can only reply that the answer depends entirely upon the government of the USA. In my last conversation with Colonel McQuail I put forward proposals for negotiations and for reaching a settlement acceptable to both sides. I explained that we could visualise that the USA might make proposals connected with the draft handed over by us or present wishes for changes. It is also possible that instead of an agreement, a protocol could be signed, as we have done with Belgium, or some other form of written settlement could be proposed.

I made the following statement, in these words, to Colonel McQuail: "These or other forms are certainly possible; but it is necessary that the American side should express its opinion in some acceptable form on these proposals." Any settlement is acceptable to us which assures the sovereignty and dignity of our country, the German Democratic Republic, and does not contain any return to the occupation period.

Mr. Topping: The second question: What in particular is slowing up the agreement on the release of the Army personnel?

Herr Winzer: The question could be stated in another form, thus: Why have we not come to an agreement with Colonel McQuail in his capacity of chief of the USA Military Mission at the Headquarters of the Supreme Commander of the Soviet Armed Forces in Germany on the return of the US Army personnel and of the US helicopter? This question has been clearly and unmistakably answered by us in the course of the negotiations. The occupation period, the occupation regime, are long and finally past. There are two German states. The sovereign German Democratic Republic has concluded a treaty on the stationing of Soviet troops in Germany for the preservation of peace and as a contribution to security in Europe with the government of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. In this agreement it is expressly stated that the Soviet troops are to refrain from any interference in the internal affairs of the German Democratic Republic. There is no mention of a military mission in this agreement on the stationing of troops. That military missions exist in the headquarters of the Soviet troops, but also in the headquarters of the American troops in Frankfurt on Main, is a circumstance which concerns only the USA and the Soviet Union.

Here in the German Democratic Republic no military missions are accredited. Thus the reference in western utterances to the agreement between Generals Huebner and Malinin, which expressly demanded the accrediting of military missions in the various zones, also loses validity. These zones exist no longer, and the sovereign German state, the German Democratic Republic, has accredited

no military missions. Recognition of this legal position cannot be avoided by the American government either. That is also why we could not reach any agreement with Colonel McQuail so long as he appeared as chief of the US Military Mission. Does this answer your question?

Mr. Topping: A supplementary question to this: It has never been made clear whether Colonel McQuail has had any authority to act in the name of the US State Department for Foreign Affairs. Can you say something about this?

Herr Winzer: I have here the reports of the negotiations with Colonel McQuail, which also contain the translations of the two letters of authorisation which Colonel McQuail presented at the third meeting. One of these was written on a sheet of paper headed "Foreign Service of the USA" and addressed "To Whom It May Concern". The statement confirms that Colonel McQuail ist authorised to carry on all negotiations and to make all necessary arrangements for the return of the helicopter and its crew, which is now detained in "East Germany", to the control of the USA. This authorisation with its curious form of address, was signed by the American Ambassador in Bonn, Mr. David Bruce.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this: Either Mr. Bruce consciously wished to discriminate against the German Democratic Republic in omitting any address and by using the expression "East Germany" — for that provides no basis for negotiations — or Mr. Bruce intends to propose himself as ambassador to us in the German Democratic Republic. For that he must take other steps, whether he likes it or not.

Mr. Topping: In other words, Mr. Minister, does that mean that the negotiations have never progressed beyond a certain point since you do not consider that Colonel McQuail can be regarded as a fully authorised representative of the US government? Is that correct?

Herr Winzer: Mr. Steinberg already put the question to us on June 13th, in connection with the declaration of Mr. Dulles, Foreign Minister of the USA, who expressed readiness in a press conference to enter into negotiations with the German Democratic Republic, whether we place the recognition of the German Democratic Republic in any form as a preliminary condition. I shall not give you an answer after twelve days, but will simply read you what I said to Colonel McQuail on June 14th. I stated then — in the first conversation, let me remind you: "We do not demand that a representative of the State Department or of the government come here. But whoever negotiates with us, whether it is a diplomat or a soldier, must have full powers from the State Department or from the government, as is usual in the settlement of questions between two states."

What followed shows that this is absolutely possible; on this basis we regulated very quickly and sensibly with Consul-General Leon Jacobs the question of the return of the Belgian airmen and of the Belgian aeroplane. I said at the first meeting with Colonel McQuail — (and I quote): "It is here not a question of the formulation, which was used by State Secretary Dulles, on the recognition or non-recognition of the German Democratic Republic, but above all of not permitting any return to the status of occupation."

Everything which has been published in the American und western press on this problem was based either on false information or on malicious misrepresentation of our attitude in this matter.

Mr. Steinberg: May I say to Mr. Minister Winzer that the very fact of our frequently visiting him indicates our interest in learning the attitude of the Foreign Ministry. Our Foreign Ministry would have had the chance to learn of your point of view earlier through AP.

Herr Winzer: I have explained the reasons why we refrained from this.

Mr. Topping: The third question, whether you would consider the signature of a protocol through an American representative as an act of diplomatic recognition of your government, has already been answered by what you have said. This question is very important, since it is also connected with the fourth question, that is, what you have to say about the accusations raised in leading articles in American newspapers that you are using this case as a form of blackmail to force the United States to accord your government diplomatic recognition.

Herr Winzer: These reproaches are simply laughable. It is clear to every sensible person that the existence of the German Democratic Republic, which has been recognised for about ten years by a large number of big and important states in which, after all, about one third of humanity lives, and maintains relations to many other states in the field of trade and culture, does not need to be confirmed through recognition by the US government. The existence of the German Democratic Republic is just as much a fact as the existence of the USA. For those politicians and journalists who obstinately deny our existence it can of course be shattering when a US helicopter with nine persons aboard lands on the territory of an allegedly non-existent state and makes nonsense of their unrealistic attitude.

Mr. Topping: The fifth question: Have the Russian government or the Soviet Army authorities expressed any intentions of intervening in this case, as was requested by the Foreign Ministry of the USA?

Herr Winzer: The gentlemen will understand that I am Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the German Democratic Republic and it cannot be my task to present any declarations for the Soviet government and its intentions. We know that the US government has sent a note to the Soviet government. The answer to it is the business of the Soviet government; but we have no doubt whatever that the Soviet government will respect the sovereignty of the German Democratic Republic and the obligations which were undertaken under the troop stationing agreement not to intervene in the internal affairs of the German Democratic Republic, just as it has respected all previous agreements.

Mr. Topping: The sixth question: Are the American army personnel in good health? Are they regarded as prisoners or placed under any sort of house arrest? Where are they held? Do they receive letters from their relatives, or can they send letters to their relatives? How do they spend their time? These questions are perhaps not so very interesting for a diplomat; nevertheless they are questions which concern the American public and above all the relatives of the nine men.

Herr Winzer: I shall reply to this question, but should like first to return to an earlier question by Mr. Steinberg. Mr. Steinberg asked whether a second note had been sent by us to the USA. I return to this question because the reproach has been levelled against us in the US and elsewhere in the western press that we had delayed matters unjustifiably. On this point I state the following:

The plane landed on Saturday. On Sunday it was impossible to reach any authorities. On Monday, through the Foreign Ministry of the Czechoslovak Republic, we informed the American diplomatic representative in Prague about the landing and declared our readiness to negotiate. On Wednesday of the same week, the first note signed by me was delivered in the original to the American Minister in Prague. But Colonel McQuail came to us in the Foreign Ministry for the first time on Saturday. At that time we were also absolutely prepared for a quick settlement. But we could accept no demands from a general who sent us a military mis-

sion chief, thus to a certain extent desiring to return to the occupation regime.

I could show you the agreement or protocol with Belgium, which contains no political conditions but simply a factual settlement of the matter. We are also prepared to come to such an agreement, or a similar one, as I have already said, with the USA.

Our two first talks took place in a comparatively good atmosphere. But on June 18th the Colonel presented demands which were — to put it politely — unacceptable and impolite. I told Colonel McQuail on June 18th that if the American authorities believe they must listen to the opinions of those people who are interested in a further division of Germany and in a hardening of tension in Europe, this is a matter of regret to us. With regard to the general claim that we link the settlement of the matter with political conditions, I stated that the position is exactly the opposite, for there are people in Bonn and elsewhere who say that the Americans should not make this agreement, which is in the interests of their own citizens, with us, because it runs counter to the claims of the Bonn government to be the sole representative of Germany or to the occupation mentality of other people.

I should like to emphasise once more that we have made no conditions whatever except the one, that everything possible must be done to avoid anything which could awaken the impression of a return to occupation status or could injure the sovereignty of the German Democratic Republic.

If I am not mistaken, Mr. Steinberg is also of German descent.

Mr. Steinberg: Yes.

Herr Winzer: As a German he ought to understand, I think, that I as a German and citizen of the German Democratic Republic stand out against any form of return to the occupation regime and that in this — I am absolutely sure — I have the full support of my countrymen.

Mr. Topping: Mr. Minister, can you say what conditions Colonel McQuail made which were so unacceptable?

Herr Winzer: It is unacceptable, for instance, that everything is to be arranged as if it were a matter of handing a cheque over the table in a bar, when it is clear that the matter requires expert settlement such as is usual between two states. May I ask you, perhaps, Mr. Topping, whether you have read the article on the nine Army men in the "New York Herald Tribune"?

Mr. Topping: There have been so many articles written about them. Which one do you mean? What in particular is said in this article?

Herr Winzer: It is the article of June 23rd, with the title "The Nine Army Men". The article contains particularly unpleasant warmongering propaganda. I shall not, however, go into details on this propaganda. But according to this paper's logic the declaration of sovereignty by the Soviet Union and the correspondingly valid agreement which we have concluded with the Soviet Union mean that the western powers now have to take over these occupation rights for themselves.

This shows that our attitude is absolutely right, that we cannot act otherwise than we are doing. I could not negotiate with Colonel McQuail on the same basis as that on which I dealt with the American occupation officers in 1945 to 1946 when I was director of the education department of the Berlin city administration.

I am convinced that every German will agree with me that we are in favour of an expert, correct and rapid conclusion of this matter, but that we must reject all forms of settlement which arise from an occupation mentality. As I said, if further evidence of the correctness of our attitude is necessary, it can be found daily in the American press.

Before we come to the personal aspects, one final remark: In the western press and above all in the USA press much noise has been made about the sum of money which we demand for the damage done by the helicopter in landing and as payment for the various expenses which have been incurred and will be incurred in the return transport.

You see, Mr. Topping, if we wanted to act according to the US government pattern, we ought not to give back the helicopter at all. As is well known, the US government has since 1952 sequestered the accounts of the German Democratic Republic in four banks in New York, which contain 1.6 million dollars. It is a question here of payments for services and deliveries of goods from the German Democratic Republic to various countries, including the USA, which at that time were negotiated through American banks.

But I can tell you, Mr. Topping, that we shall not follow the example of these free-booter methods in international money transactions, but will continue to seek a sensible settlement for the quick return of the US Army men and of the helicopter. The fact that I did not accept payment over the table from Colonel McQuail does not alter this. Here I should like to point out that the Colonel obviously did not feel particularly comfortable in this case, nor in other cases, in the role which has been prescribed for him.

Mr. Topping: Can you tell me exactly what sum is involved in these expenses?

Herr Winzer: At the time we made our proposal, it was 13,000 marks. But I am afraid the sum will increase the longer the matter remains unsettled. And now to further questions.

Mr. Topping: The seventh question is: Why has no official American personage been allowed to visit the men? The eighth question: Would you give permission for a representative of Associated Press to speak to any one of the Army men, and if not, why not? And the ninth question: Can we have an official photograph of the Army men, to show that they are living under appropriate conditions?

Herr Winzer: Let us take the ninth question first: you can have the photograph. I do not have it here, but I shall give an order to have it made.

With regard to questions 6 and 7, the gentlemen must permit me to make a few preliminary remarks. It has been claimed in the western press that the American officers and sergeant are in preliminary arrest, or even more sinister discoveries have been served up. I can assure you with full responsibility that the nine Army men are living in a very pleasant place. One could say there are enjoying an involuntary holiday. Some of those looking after them even speak of the "sanatorium guests". Efforts are also made to entertain them. For instance, it was arranged for them to see such films — very useful in my opinion — as "The German Story" and "Operation Teutonic Sword", so as to give them a proper understanding of their present comrades in arms, General Speidel and other former Nazi leaders.

But although we behave absolutely correctly towards your Army personnel and although the statements of the Belgian pilots confirm this correct behaviour, such expressions as "kidnapper" and so on are popular amongst you. It is made to appear as if the poor army officers had lost their way in the woods like Little Red Riding Hood and the wicked wolf had gobbled them up.

But in judging the case the real state of affairs should not be lost sight of. It is here quite incontestibly a case of eight important artillery officers of the 3rd Panzer Division

which, so far as I am informed, is even equipped with rockets. Amongst them is, significantly enough, an officer for topographic investigations from the artillery staff of this division — Captain Allan Brister. We do not know what topographic problems interest these gentlemen. But so much is certain: we did not invite them to our Republic.

Despite all this, we were and are still prepared to settle the matter in a simple and cooperative way. But you, gentlemen, the American public and also your government must understand that the defamation of our Republic forces us to demand a settlement which will protect us from such defamation in future. Articles such as that which appeared in the "New York Herald Tribune" do not help to make settlement easier, but only complicate matters.

Permit me finally to make a remark which may seem somewhat irrelevant: When it is a question of the peoples' fear of atom bomb flights, assurances are regularly given by the Americans that the US air force functions absolutely surely and reliably, that nothing can possibly happen. But in this case a plane from just this air force turned up more than 100 kilometres away from its real destination and was finally compelled to land, with slight damage.

Mr. Topping: Did the petrol supply run out?

Herr Winzer: I do not know. I was not there. Since in addition the weather on that day was perfect for flying, the question is justified as to whether, if the US Air Force is not even in a position to bring eight important officiers of a panzer division safely to their destination, it can always guarantee to the European peoples that it will bring atom and H-bombs safely home again? But as I said, gentlemen, I regard this as a side remark which nevertheless forces itself on the attention.

Now to the actual contents of questions 6 and 7: I should like to state that Colonel McQuail has only once asked us to hand over a case of cigarettes and other articles to the nine Army men. This was at our first conversation. We took the case and passed it on to the nine army men in the usual way. As you know, this has not been mentioned in the American and western press.

Mr. Topping: AP passed on this information.

Herr Winzer: So much the better. I have not seen it in the press. Letters for the army men have not yet arrived and could therefore not be passed on. But I see no reason not to allow such correspondence. But up till now no-one from the American side has approached us. The officers themselves, as far as I know, have not yet expressed a wish to send letters away. But the American authorities are free to undertake appropriate steps.

With regard to their place of residence, I shall not, for definite reasons, inform you where it is, since we have had bad experiences of certain organisations, certainly not unknown to you, and their agents. We should only be placing an unnecessary burden on our authorities in obliging them to concern themselves with the agents of certain secret services. We are not interested in this, and the American side should also have no interest in it.

As I said, a picture or pictures will be prepared for you. We are prepared to do that. We are also prepared to provide the army men with any other facilities which you may wish.

But we believe that the best alleviation would be a quick settlement of the matter. I state once more that we are prepared for this. The proposals and possibilities for negotiations I have already presented not only to you but also to Colonel McQuail. It now lies with the American side to show the same good will which we have shown throughout the entire proceedings. We are still ready for any settlement consistent with the dignity and sovereignty of our Republic.

I believe I have thus answered your questions and also a number of other questions which have arisen from the press reports of the last few days.

Mr. Topping: Are there prospects of further meetings with the American representatives at the moment?

Herr Winzer: We have stated our readiness. There is not only the possibility of dealing with Colonel McQuail. There are other possibilities. Various possibilities have been weighed and discussed in the press. Some of these are not irrelevant. But that does not lie with us, and I should not like to express an opinion on the one or the other, simply in order not to give rise to further complications.

Mr. Topping: I have certainly received answers to all my questions. And I thank you. I should like to emphasise once more that I represent an independent news agency and that it is its task to provide objective news. It tries to do this. That is why I welcome an interview of this kind, so that each side can present its views.

Herr Winzer: The result remains to be seen.

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